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ABSTRACT

Two over-present occupational hazards that persistently weaken educational efforts in schools are (1) organizational aspects of the institution that distract from the goal of helping young people become the best possible individuals they can, and (2) infatuation with the means of education to the extent that the ends of education are not central or salient. Improved effectiveness in education will come from teachers who possess extraordinary qualities of mind and heart, exhibit a constant readiness to begin anew and adapt, and have been extremely carefully prepared. (RH)

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WHAT MUST WE DO TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATION OF THOSE WHO INTEND TO TEACH?

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Since the object of this discussion is intended or invited to treat some "non-traditional" ways that people might enter the teaching profession, and because the goal of traditional teacher preparation programs is not merely to educate teachers or those who intend to teach as an end in itself but rather to insure that the teaching, when actualized, is effective, I am approaching this topic and offering my considerations not from the standpoint of "What must we do to improve the education of those who intend to teach?", but rather from the orientation of "What must we do to improve the effectiveness of those who intend to teach?"

In my mind there are two ever present occupational hazards which persistently weaken educational efforts in schools. First, the structure, the organization, the institution we call "education" tends to distract us from what it is we are all about -- the education of young people, that is, helping young people become the best possible person they can become. This is the aim of the life long education we all experience, of which schooling is but a part. Schooling, therefore, should not lose sight of that. In short, before we educate technicians, mathematicians, scientists, or what have you, we must be explicitly intent on educating active, thinking men and women, great men and women, men and women of commanding genius, of generous aims, and high and noble aspirations.

Secondly, educators must beware of becoming so enamored with the means of education (i.e., new math, phonics, marking system, homogeneous grouping, etc.) that they lose sight of the end of education, thereby making the means the end, or letting the way we do things get in the way of what we hope to accomplish.

Therefore, an explicit presumption in this presentation of how to improve the effectiveness of those who intend to teach is that current legislation and practice will not only not stand in our way, but we will first seek the best ways and means and then legislate them, begin to practice them, no matter what that means about current legislation and practice.

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Because teachers determine whether a school can bring its goals to fruition, teachers are very important people. Improved effectiveness will come from teachers who (1) possess extraordinary qualities of mind and heart, (2) a constant readiness to begin anew and adapt, and (3) extremely careful preparation.

1. Extraordinary qualities of mind and heart

   a. Candidates for teaching must possess characters and live lives which exemplify ethical and moral values. As with all public figures, the moral character and responsibilities of teachers need increasing attention.

   b. Candidates for teaching must exemplify a love and excitement for learning in general and then for a particular subject.

   c. Candidates for teaching must demonstrate a sincere liking for young people. They must not be out to control young people nor should they be afraid of young people. Rather, they should be able to sense the pain and the joy that flows through youth.

   d. Candidates for teaching must exhibit an appreciation for the fact that the educational process is not unilateral (teacher to student) but

rather bilateral (both teacher and student learn). Consequently, they must appreciate the limited experience of young men and women. They must exhibit the talent which does not talk down to the students but rather which allows the teacher to relate his/her own expertise to the everyday experience of the student.

2. Constant readiness to begin anew and adapt

   a. Candidates for teaching must show a realization and appreciation for the fact that teaching is its own profession with its own skills. It is not enough to merely have a thorough academic background. Consequently, when coming in from an alternate preparation or early on in a teacher preparation program, there must be some extended (two years) pre-service classroom experience under a master teacher. During this time, there must be some evidence of a willingness to accept help from peers and supervisors. The frequency and quality of help is a critical difference between good and bad teaching. (SRI Teacher Perceiver Interview or other instruments would help.)

   b. During this pre-service experience, there must be some formal training in communication and human relation skills.

   c. The above points presuppose an extended intern program before embarking on a formal teaching career.

   d. For those who come in from an alternate preparation or field, there must be a history of continuous professional updating.

3. Extremely careful preparation

   a. There is an overall need to raise the entrance requirements for the teaching profession. Just as it should be more difficult to enter the teaching profession, it should also take longer. The considerations contained in #1 and #2 above are attempts to demonstrate this.

   b. Candidates for the teaching profession should receive a good liberal education so that they may interrelate the world of knowledge for their students. Only then should they specialize. This is especially true when it comes to the sciences.

   c. Once a good liberal education is achieved, candidates for teaching should be exposed to a knowledge of all current educational trends, manifest a willingness to implement those which might benefit potential students, and demonstrate a competency in utilizing them.

   d. Candidates for teaching should be given a solid introduction into child and adolescent development as well as the varying teaching-learning styles that exist.

   e. Over and above general class management training, candidates for teaching should receive an excellent methods course in the field of their major which would include the basics in questioning, lesson planning, use of resources, and approaches to specific content areas in their field.

   f. Finally, the first years of one's teaching experience should be regarded as an internship during which time teachers would be subject to master teacher supervision, peer supervision before any form of permanency as a teacher could be expected.